

The House defeated a GOP amendment Thursday that would have blocked funds to an airport named after Rep. John Murtha (D-Pa.), but approved a separate measure aimed at projects named after lawmakers.

Both GOP measures were aimed at forcing Democrats to either distance themselves or show support for the John Murtha Johnstown-Cambria Airport. Media reports over the last month have focused on the \$150 million in federal funds Murtha has directed to the airport since 1990 even though only six commercial flights a week depart from it.

Republicans have labeled it the “Airport for No One,” a play on the now-notorious “Bridge to Nowhere” in Alaska, which was backed by Republican lawmakers in that state. A multi-million dollar earmark for that bridge became the symbol of Washington pork-barrel spending in the last election cycle.

Democrats beat back a motion to recommit the Federal Aviation Administration authorization bill that was sponsored by **Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.) and supported by Republican leaders. The motion to recommit would have attached language to the FAA bill blocking all future funding for the Murtha airport.**

That effort failed on a 154-263 vote, with 11 Democrats crossing the aisle to vote with Republicans and 28 Republicans voting with the Democratic majority.

“To say this is wasteful understates how bad it really is,” Campbell said.

Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman James Oberstar (D-Minn.) gave a rousing defense of the airport, saying that it provided service for 1,000 military personnel, including the National Guard.

“This is an attack on essential air service to rural America,” Oberstar thundered.

When Republicans responded with laughter, Oberstar grew even more incensed.

“Those on the other side who are laughing won’t be laughing when airports in their communities are attacked,” he said.

Murtha, as well as Moran and Rep. Peter Visclosky (D-Ind.), has faced scrutiny for his ties to a lobbying firm under investigation by the FBI and for directing earmarks to the firm’s clients.

Only two lawmakers, Democratic Reps. Jim Moran (Va.) and Nick Rahall (W.Va.), voted against a separate amendment prohibiting any funds from being used to name a building, project or program for a currently serving member of Congress. The measure, sponsored by Rep. Mike McCaul (R-Texas) was approved.

McCaul said Murtha’s airport, as well as other earmark projects named after sitting members, such as the Charles B. Rangel Center for Public Service at the City College of New York, “fuel the beliefs that members of Congress are arrogant and out of touch with their constituents.”

Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) declared the legislation “the end of the ‘monuments to me,’” a reference to entities named after members who earmark funds for the projects.

McCaul said he planned to offer the same amendment to all upcoming appropriations bills. That language would prevent lawmakers from directing funds to any already-existing entities named after sitting members of Congress, even if an outside group named it after the lawmaker.

“That’s going to be more interesting to see how the appropriators vote on it,” McCaul said.